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However, once inside, there is a change of mood. The narrator is made welcome and is entertained at a bizarrely jolly banquet, where the tunes are strangely discordant and the guests decoratively but somewhat oddly dressed. Several blackened figures then burst in. It turns out

that, taking advantage of the new ‘soothing’ system the lunatics had taken over the asylum, under the leadership of the superintendent who had become insane; the keepers were locked up... after having been tarred and feathered. The scene reminds one of the asylum balls which

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were recorded and depicted at the time, and while the effect is on the whole humorous, there are reminders of the macabre similar to Poe’s

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The System of Dr Tarr and Professor Fether (1845) Edgar Allan Poe - psychiatrists in 19th-century fiction

Fiona Subotsky
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